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ABSTRACT

An estimated one-third of Sweden's adult population pursues some type of studies. The primary forms of education and training available for adults in Sweden are residential adult colleges, folk high schools, voluntary educational associations or study circles, municipal and national adult education programs, adult basic education programs, public library or audiovisual aid center-sponsored activities, training programs sponsored by employee organizations or employers, educational television and radio, and correspondence schools. Study circle, municipal adult education, and folk high school programs are supervised by the National Board of Education. Except for study circles, all adult educational programming is available without charge. Adult learners in Sweden are also eligible for study funds payable in the form of hourly or daily study grants. Much of the rapid growth of adult education in Sweden in recent years has resulted from collaboration and coordination among various public and private agencies, including trade unions, employers, municipal governments, and educational associations. Through the national student union and its local branches, Sweden's adult learners have themselves become involved in designing the adult education system, recruiting new target groups, encouraging educational development work, and improving the financial aid system. (MN)

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Fact Sheets on Sweden

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Adult Education in Sweden

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It is estimated that one third of Sweden's adult population pursues studies in one form or another. This is a very high proportion by world standards, and may be partly explained by the great variety of forms for adult studies that have gradually emerged in the past hundred years and been justified on different grounds. Those forms for adult studies, folk high schools and study circles, which have their roots in and are still firmly established in the popular movements, are the oldest examples. Correspondence schools and courses arranged by the broadcasting media and the labor market organizations are other important forms. As a modern labor market policy took shape it provided for public labor market training (AMU), which is especially intended for the unemployed and people in danger of losing their jobs. In 1968, the state-run system of adult education was augmented by a municipally sponsored system, which gives adults greater opportunities to study at levels corresponding to the senior level of the comprehensive school, i.e. the last three grades of basic compulsory education, and to the upper secondary school, which is voluntary. These broadened opportunities stood out as a legitimate demand for fair play after nine years of basic schooling was made mandatory.

The forms of education and training mentioned above are usually referred to collectively as "adult education." As such it is a category made to include all education which normally does not articulate with previous formal schooling, and which commences for the vast majority of participants after a shorter or longer period of gainful employment or work in the home. The exposition in this text will be mainly confined to the following types of adult education: folk high school, study circles, municipal and state-run adult education and labor market training. In spite of the fact that many adults are affected by the increased possibilities of access to higher education, that type of education does not yet fit into the Swedish concept of adult education and is not covered by the following exposition.

All the above categories of adult education, except some types of private courses, generally receive subsidies from the national government.

Let us summarize the aims of adult education. To begin with, adult education should enable middle-aged and older people to raise their level of general knowledge and increase their possibilities to take part in cultural, social and political activities. It should contribute to the further democratization of society. Adult education should strengthen the position of individuals in working life. It should however also cater for individual preferences and needs.

Since the late sixties, adult education has come to cover larger and larger areas. Its forms of distribution have changed and the economic conditions for studies have improved. However, with the fiscal situation so precarious in recent years, some restraints have been imposed.

As of 1976, employers began paying a special payroll tax for adult education. This money is used, among other things, to finance a restricted number of study allowances for adults undergoing education, according to the same general principles as for other adult students but also taking into account their obligation to support a family. The payroll tax also finances study circles in civics and in the native languages of immigrants, as well as part of the study circles and outreach programs at workplaces. These funds are distributed by special regional adult education boards.

Outreach programs are aimed primarily at establishing contact with people having less than nine years of primary schooling. The outreach programs at workplaces are administered by local branches of trade unions and outreach programs in residential areas are handled by the voluntary educational associations. In the latter case, priority is given to establishing contact with immigrants, the disabled, housewives and others working in the home.

Further, all employees enjoy an unconditional right to take leave of absence for studies that must be pursued during working hours. Although the leave to which they are entitled by law is unpaid, certain grants are available. Hourly and daily study grants provide compensation for loss of income. Studies which must be pursued for longer, uninterrupted periods qualify for a special adult study allowance which is mainly intended for persons of low previous educational attainments.

For natural reasons the major trade union confederations have shown keen interest both in the form and content of adult education. Recent developments have largely been impelled by union demands.

Residential adult colleges, "folk high schools"

A specifically Scandinavian form of adult education is the folk high school, which is mainly residential. The folk high school is not the form of adult education with the greatest number of participants, but the oldest one. The first folk high schools were founded in the mid-19th century to give young rural adults better opportunities for general education. Now they receive students from all strata of life. Today, the folk high schools are owned either by county councils or by trade unions, churches, temperance societies or other non-profit organizations.

Each school determines its own curriculum within the framework of the Folk High School Code. In spite of the fact that there is no official syllabus or compulsory subject matter for folk high schools they can qualify students for university studies. Studies focus on topic areas rather than on single subjects. A significant feature of these schools is the high degree of student participation in educational planning and implementation.

In recent years the around 120 folk high schools have together enrolled about 260,000 students annually. The schools offer a variety of courses ranging from two days to over 30 weeks in length. The past few years

have witnessed a changing pattern of recruitment to folk high schools. Great and rapidly increasing numbers of students are recruited for short courses which particularly the voluntary educational associations and the popular movements organize in partnership with these schools. Enrollments have also increased among the ranks of immigrants and disabled persons. An extensive pilot scheme for the instruction of disabled persons is financed with special government funds. In recent years many students have taken long courses to train themselves for full-time leadership of leisure activities. Some schools have special programs for young adults who are unemployed and who generally lack interest in studies as well as in vocational training.

Training of teachers for the folk high schools is organized at the University of Linköping. The training period is one year. Before entering, the students have a university degree and some experience of adult education or a thorough knowledge in the field of adult education acquired during many years of practical work. The training combines theory with practice.

Voluntary educational associations

By far the largest number of today's adult learners attend the study circles organized by the local branches of Sweden's educational associations. In the fiscal year 1983/84, nearly 280,000 study circles attracted about 2,420,000 participants, of whom slightly over half were women. That figure should be put in relation to Sweden's total population of about eight million and its adult population (aged 20–67) of about five million. But since any one participant may take part in more than one study circle, no net figure can be given. These study circles are sponsored by ten voluntary educational associations, of which the largest, the Workers' Educational Association (*Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund, ABF*), accounts for just over one third of the total study circle hours qualifying for national government subsidies.

In the regulations for awarding government subsidies to voluntary educational associations, a study circle is defined as "an informal group which meets for the common pursuit of well-planned studies of a subject or problem area which has previously been decided upon." The group itself determines how its work is to be planned and carried out. A circle leader has certain coordinating and administrative tasks but does not act as a teacher in the ordinary sense. There are no formal requirements for circle leaders.

To be eligible for a subsidy, a study circle must have between five and twenty members. It must meet for at least fifteen periods spread over at least four weeks. Each meeting may last no more than three periods. The subsidy, fixed at a certain amount per period, covers about 40% of the costs, with the remainder coming from fees and municipal grants. Study circle sessions are supplemented by cultural activities such as amateur projects and cultural programs for associations and societies.

Two subject areas account for two thirds of the study circle hours: esthetic (arts) subjects and civics. Study circles in civics, Swedish, mathematics, and in the native languages of immigrants have been given higher priority through a system of extra government subsidies.

There are also study circles at university level. So far the number of participants in such circles has been about 1% of the total.

Immigrant education has grown rapidly in volume and has come to bulk ever larger in the total course offerings at the educational associations as well as of study programs offered by various firms or companies on the labor market. This type of adult education took on concrete shape in 1967.

Municipal adult education

Formal adult education—both general and vocational—is offered by the local education committees in all of Sweden's 284 municipalities and also, in certain educational fields (e.g. the care sector), by the 23 county councils. In addition there are two national schools for adults which provide supplementary educational opportunities (see below).

The municipal adult education (*Komvux*) curriculum which came into force in 1982 confirmed the divorce between this type of adult education and youth education. This curriculum is specially designed for adults, based on adult needs and tailored to the situation of the adult. Although the curriculum outlines a separate system of formal or credential and vocational education, all courses and leaving certificates are comparable with those of youth education and educational standards are intended to be the same in both systems.

Courses and leaving certificates are based on the modular system, which can be regarded as a modified unit/credit system. This makes it possible for the adult participant to begin studying in accordance with his own needs, i.e. to supplement previous basic education and/or job experience.

There are few formal obstacles built into the system. The adult student enters the modular system at the level at which he is capable and studies as far as he needs to, either part-time of full-time.

The individual determines his own workload, in keeping with his own circumstances. The participant can study during the daytime or evening, combine general subject courses with vocational courses, attend just a single subject course in the evenings or else include a maximum of educational activity in the working week. He may combine studies with full-time gainful employment or else study full-time on a government grant for a limited period. The adult is free to compose his own study program according to personal preference and needs.

There are no major formal impediments such as entrance requirements or examinations. Individual opportunities are limited only by practical and economic constraints.

In more than a hundred of Sweden's municipalities, courses are organized and administered by special adult education units. Otherwise youth education offers a selection of courses following the adult education curriculum, even if teaching staff and other resources are pooled.

By tradition, instruction is free of charge—municipal authorities receive government subsidies—and legislation passed in the mid-1970s entitles adults to special forms of study assistance and also to educational leave (for a limited period). This has led to an increase in the full-time daytime student population, but the traditional part-time adult student attending evening classes still predominates.

In addition to qualifying for higher studies, many students use municipal adult education as a means of improving their professional qualifications, for instance by attending computer science or CAD/CAM courses, while others may obtain their basic qualifications for a certain job, for example in the restaurant trade or the care sector.

Municipal adult education opportunities range from short-cycle vocational courses to post-secondary academic courses or advanced full-time vocational education.

According to the latest figures, the number of participants (for a selected week) was roughly 300,000, including some 200,000 women. Half these students are taking general subjects at upper secondary school level, while 25% are undergoing vocational education and the remainder are taking courses at a lower level.

Efforts have been made recently to give municipal adult education more of an occupational slant, that is to bring it more closely into line with the immediate requirements of the labor market and in fact to utilize this kind of adult education as an instrument of labor market policy, that is to use it for purposes resembling those of labor market training. Special courses and student benefits have been introduced for the unemployed.

Basic education for adults

Legislation was introduced in 1977 requiring municipal authorities to organize a special form of adult education known as basic education for adults (*Grundvux*). Basic education for adults is mostly organized within or in conjunction with municipal adult education, but it is a special type of education having different status, since the municipalities are required by law to make it available.

Basic education for adults was originally intended for Swedes who were "functionally illiterate" and whose knowledge of school subjects was appreciably inferior to that of the average compulsory school pupil. Later on it came to be provided for illiterate or poorly educated immigrants. Instruction can be organized individually or in small groups both in Swedish and in immigrant languages. It is usually available on both a half-time and full-time basis. Participants receive hourly study assistance. About 40% of the 10,000 or so people taking part in basic education for adults in 1982 were Swedes.

National schools for adults

Educational opportunities of roughly the same kind as municipal adult education and based on the same curriculum are offered by two national schools for adults. These provide a supplement to municipal adult education for persons who for various reasons (shift work, geographical distance, etc.) are unable to attend regular courses. The courses at these schools combine various distribution methods, including correspondence studies and intensive short-cycle courses.

Public libraries and audio-visual aids centers

Public libraries and audio-visual aids centers run by local education committees play an important part in adult education. Libraries lend books, tapes and filmstrips to study circles, schools and private persons. The centers record radio broadcasts and provide copying and lending services. The libraries arrange exhibitions, lectures, concerts, etc. which tie in with and generally support study circles and courses.

Labor market training

Labor market training may be defined as any program for which a special kind of training allowance is granted by the National Labor Market Board (*Arbetsmarknadsstyrelsen, AMS*). These allowances are granted for various kinds of vocational training and for such preparatory training as is required for the vocational program. The following conditions are laid down for receiving such allowances: the applicant is unemployed or runs the risk of becoming so; he is difficult to place in employment; he has reached the age of 20; he is seeking work through the public employment service and training can be expected to result in permanent employment which would not have been possible without such training. However, there are certain exceptions to these rules. In some cases young people under 20 may be granted a training allowance. Since the mid-1960s, moreover, certain courses for occupations where skills are in markedly short supply have also been available to members of the labor force (bottleneck-skills training).

Labor market training may be divided into four main categories depending on who administers the courses; special courses arranged by the National Board of Education, training within industry, training within the ordinary educational system and courses arranged by organizations. The special courses arranged by the National Board of Education expanded very rapidly during the latter half of the 1960s, especially during economic recessions. These courses, which now account for the major part of all labor market training, are mainly held at some 50 special training centers throughout Sweden. Special courses are also given at another 60 places. The total annual enrollment in labor market training has been around 100,000 in the last few years.

The primary objective of labor market training is to ensure steady jobs for the unemployed. Regular follow-up studies show that of those who have taken vocational courses and who then enter the labor market, some 80% have obtained jobs within three months of course completion. Approx. 85% of these people have, in turn, obtained work within the occupational branch for which they were trained.

Courses used for labor market training must fulfill special requirements. As a rule the training should lead to specific occupations rather than to occupational branches, and the importance of limiting the period of training is often greater than in other forms of training. In addition, trainees in manpower training normally have more specific training objectives than other trainees. The construction of courses on a modular system which can be freely combined is particularly suitable for labor market training, as is the division of courses into several stages, each with a varying degree of specialization. To permit the unemployed to start training without any unnecessary delay, courses are arranged as far as possible with continuous admission and not split into terms. It must be feasible to adapt the course range in prompt response to occupational trends on the labor market. A reserve of facilities and equipment should therefore normally be available.

A substantial proportion of those enrolled in labor market training have no other educational attainments than six to eight years of elementary schooling. To give these groups a wider range of choice on the labor market is a major redistributive goal of manpower training. At present, trainees at the special training centers with only an elementary educational background are given an eight-week course in general subjects before they start their vocational training, and those taking certain vocational courses are given further theoretical training in the form of a preparatory course.

Staff training in the public and private sectors

Some government authorities train their own employees. In certain agencies, for example the Customs Service, the Post Office and the Labor Market Board, a complete vocational training course is provided. More advanced training in the form of short and long courses is available within most government agencies.

The county councils and larger municipal governments have extensive staff training programs. Nursing staff in county hospitals and other county-operated health care institutions receive vocational training. Advanced courses are also available. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and the Federation of County Councils each have training departments which sponsor courses for various staff categories and for elected municipal and county officials.

Most large private companies have training departments which carry out educational planning and sponsor courses. Employees of small and medium-sized firms are eligible for training courses sponsored by the various employer federations and their affiliated trade associations. A number of joint employer-employee bodies also sponsor training to meet the needs of working life, among these are courses for shop stewards.

As a rule the employer pays the cost of staff training and the participants pay no fee. Staff training programs within local governments and private companies are not generally eligible for national government subsidies. An exception is on-the-job training of an elementary vocational nature sponsored by an employer in collaboration with the local upper secondary school, referred to as "intramural company schools."

Training programs sponsored by employee organizations

Sweden's two largest employee organizations, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) and the Central Organization of Salaried Employees (TCO), have extensive study programs of their own. They are designed to give union members a solid background in union affairs and other social matters. They also supply trained union officials at local, regional and national levels. Most courses are residential and last one or two weeks, but some last up to six months. The national government provides subsidies for these programs.

A vital task for the trade unions as well as for the organized employers is to give all employees information and training on the various labor-law statutes that have been enacted in recent years. The most important of these from the educational aspect is the Act on Employee Participation in Decision-making (also called the Co-determination Act), which came into force in 1977. So far all public employees have been assured of at least two days of information about this law on the strength of special contracts. But knowledge must also be spread about the Security of Employment Act and the Act concerning the Status of Shop Stewards.

Radio, television and correspondence schools

Educational programs on radio and television are produced by a special corporation which operates on government funds. The programs are aimed at the regular schools as well as at adult students and undergraduates in higher education. Broadcast programs are usually supplemented with printed study material. The broadcasting media collaborate with various sponsors of adult education.

Two correspondence schools, Hermods and Brevskolan, dominate this educational medium. Hermods designs courses chiefly aimed at helping people fulfill the formal requirements for completion of courses at compulsory comprehensive, upper secondary and university levels. Brevskolan mainly caters to the needs of various special-interest organizations.

In recent years the traditional type of correspondence course has been increasingly combined with other forms of instruction, especially study circles and educational broadcasts. This type of combined course generally leads to more effective learning than pure correspondence courses.

New target groups in adult education

Up to the late sixties adult education was mostly addressed to people who themselves took the initiative in demanding educational opportunities. The past twenty years have brought major changes in the school system, marked by the lengthening of compulsory schooling to nine years and the introduction of an integrated upper secondary school, which about 90% of all sixteen-year-olds enter straight after leaving the compulsory comprehensive school or a few years later. As a result more active recruitment methods must be used to awaken an interest in education among certain categories of adults.

The largest target group for these new recruitment campaigns consists of older people with six or seven years of primary schooling who have never enrolled for any further education. The educational needs of these people can be met through study circle programs, sometimes in combination with

courses organized by folk high schools, municipal and national adult education, educational broadcasts combined with correspondence courses or study circles, or in conjunction with labor market training and trade union courses. Extra government subsidies and lowered minimum requirements as regards the number of students needed to start a class have made it easier to organize adult education programs in rural areas.

Despite these measures aimed at creating equal opportunities in different parts of Sweden, small municipalities and sparsely populated areas have a much smaller proportion of adult students than cities and towns. But even more serious than these regional differences are the differences between the various groups in society. According to a survey made by the Statistics Sweden in the 1970s, the chief beneficiaries of adult education are the already well-educated. Only one sixth of those with less than nine years of primary schooling take part in adult studies, while nearly half of those with higher education do so. So it looks as though the strong commitment to adult education would tend to widen the educational and training gaps between people rather than narrow them. The forms both for educational distribution and for outreach activity must be developed through research and continued experimentation.

The mentally retarded and those with serious physical handicaps are other groups whose education was once often neglected. Special efforts have been made to open up both the regular school system and the various forms of adult education to the disabled. The folk high schools in particular have done a great deal to help these people. In addition, educational broadcasts, labor market training and trade union courses have been designed with the needs of disabled people in mind.

The educational associations offer immigrants instruction free of charge in the Swedish language and orientation on Swedish society. Since 1973 immigrant employees have been entitled to 240 hours of Swedish lessons during working hours, with full pay. Even the labor market training program gives Swedish courses for immigrants.

Courses based on the curriculum of the nine-year compulsory school are offered to inmates of Swedish prisons with little formal education or with a low level of general knowledge. Inmates who especially request it can pursue studies at upper secondary or university levels. As a rule these courses are arranged in collaboration with local school authorities. At certain prisons individual inmates may also study on a full-time basis. One prison in Uppsala is exclusively intended for inmates who are pursuing studies.

Government inspection of adult education

Study circle programs, municipal adult education and folk high schools are supervised by the National Board of Education (*Skoloverstyrelsen, SO*). Among other things this means that the Board ensures that these courses operate in compliance with the general guidelines laid down by the government and Parliament. It also implies that the national government is responsible for teacher training, and that adult education in the above-described forms is included in the areas of educational research and development work carried out with the help of government funds.

About one fifth of the Board's total R&D budget appropriation now goes to projects in the adult education area. These projects are concerned with operational goals, organizational structure, working methods and teaching aids. A major part of the R&D thrust focuses on the participants in education, their needs and circumstances. But research is also being devoted to those who do not participate to find out the reasons why and to improve the ways of reaching ever larger groups.

The labor market training program is the result of direct collaboration between the Labor Market Board and the National Board of Education. In other words, these two government agencies are jointly responsible for designing the program, maintaining its quality and carrying out educational development work in this field.

Financing adult education

All three levels of education in Sweden —compulsory comprehensive, upper secondary and higher education—are financed in their entirety out of public funds. No tuition fees are charged. There are still a few private schools, but their number has been declining. Those students who continue their studies beyond the nine-year compulsory comprehensive school receive a government study allowance, which is a continuation of the quarterly child allowance the government paid earlier to their parents. Undergraduates in universities, colleges and professional schools receive government study assistance in the form of outright grants and repayable loans. It is only natural that adult learners should be eligible in principle for the same tuition-free instruction and at least the same study fund benefits when they take the same types of courses as their younger counterparts.

Study funds are also payable in the form of hourly and daily study grants to adults who pursue adult studies either for shorter periods or for part of the day on a systematic basis. The hourly study grant makes it feasible to pursue studies in study-circle form on work-time, while the daily study grant helps cover the cost of board and lodging and compensates for the income lost when short courses are taken at folk high schools. The study grant payable to adult students was reformed in 1975 and has been steadily improved since then. Public policy measures in this area have sharply stepped up the inflows into different kinds of adult studies, mainly the municipal adult education and the study circles.

Except for study circles, the types of adult education described in this Fact Sheet are in principle entirely free of charge, although in practice there may be some expenses for study materials. The tuition fees paid by participants in study circles are quite low.

More than one tenth of the national outlays on education goes to the various kinds of adult education that are described here. On top of that an equal amount is spent on advancing allowances to students enrolled in labor market training, which is entirely government-financed. Local authority expenditures on adult education have also increased rapidly. Municipal governments pay about one third of the costs of municipal adult education and about the same proportion of the costs of study circles.

National, county and municipal governments together employ more than one fourth of Sweden's working population. Their staff training programs are extensive and are aimed at all categories of employees. Thus through direct payments, subsidy systems and financial assistance to students, the national, county and local governments pay the lion's share of adult education costs in Sweden. Other contributors to these costs include the popular movements, political and non-profit organizations, trade unions and private companies.

Coordination of adult education programs

An important prerequisite for the rapid growth of adult education in recent years has been collaboration between the various agencies and organizations involved. The trade unions have assumed a leading role from the very start, as have the political parties. The political decisions on which the current adult education system is based were reached through consensus among the political parties.

Municipal governments and the educational associations have initiated far-reaching collaboration and created a conscious division of labor on the local plane. Through the national student union and its local branches, the adult learners themselves have become involved in designing the adult education system, recruiting new target groups, encouraging educational development work and improving the financial aid system.

However, coordination is aspired to not only where different kinds of adult education are concerned. The feasibility of coordinating upper secondary education with municipal adult education and labor market training will also be investigated. Taken together, these integrating efforts should lead to more efficient methods of organizing adult courses and should give the individual student better economic conditions and better service facilities. In this way it should become possible for all adults to take part in a process of recurrent education that will help them perform better in their occupations as well as in their general role as members of Swedish society.

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